

Nicole Albee

Readfield, Maine

February 17, 2021

**Testimony of Nicole Albee, MSW Intern**

In Support of LD 211

An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness

Dear Members of the Committee on Labor and Housing,

I writing today to show support in favor of LD 211, An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness. This bill would increase the funding for low barrier emergency shelters, and positively impact Maine's homeless individuals.

My name is Nicole Albee, and I am an MSW student at the University of New England. Part of my role as a professional social worker is to advocate for clients and public policy issues that impact the lives of clients. During my time as a second-year intern at Alternative Wellness Services, I have met several clients who are either at a high-risk of experiencing homelessness, or are currently homeless. My colleagues and fellow students could provide countless instances of the traumatic impact that occurs when a person is without adequate shelter.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a five-tier model that describes basic human needs. In fact, of the five levels, physiological needs such as food, water, warmth and shelter are at the very base of this pyramid. As stated by McLeod (2020), "if these [physiological needs] are not satisfied the human body cannot function optimally. Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met" (para. 13).

The additional four layers of that encompass psychological and self-fulfillment cannot happen without access to a shelter.

Maine winters are harsh and unrelenting. As I write this testimony, icy rain is lashing down and the wind-chill is around 9°F. I cannot imagine how challenging and traumatizing it would be to be without shelter in these conditions. For many Mainers, this their everyday reality. While we hear statistics about homeless individuals, a person can never truly understand the physical and emotional harm that occurs if this reality has not been experienced first-hand. As a professional social worker, I know that continuing to advocate for clients is the very least we can do to show humanity to those in need. As lawmakers during an ongoing pandemic, you're tasked with the power to truly help our community members most in need.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2019 Annual Homeless report, Maine ranked 11<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states for the percentage of homeless citizens. (The Center Square, 2021). An article in the Bangor Daily News from November of 2020 said there has been a steep increase in homelessness due to COVID-19. "The pandemic has made it increasingly difficult for housing insecure residents across Maine to couch surf—staying with a friend or family member, usually for a short period—and decreased the number of affordable housing units" (Marino, 2020, para. 3).

To summarize, it is clear that this policy is a move in the right direction toward establishing more sustainable action around homelessness in Maine. My hope is that in the near future, we have the appropriate resources in place to provide shelter, and sustainable housing, to all Mainers experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for your thoughtful attention regarding my testimony on LD 211.

## References

- Marino, D. (2020, November 16). *Homelessness in Portland approaches record high amid pandemic*. Bangor Daily News. Retrieved from <https://bangordailynews.com/2020/11/16/news/portland/homelessness-in-portland-approaches-record-high-amid-pandemic/>.
- McLeod, S. (2020, December 29). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Simply Psychology. Retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html#gsc.tab=0>.
- The Center Square. (2021, January 6). *Maine homeless population numbered 2,106 last year study finds*. Retrieved from [https://www.thecentersquare.com/maine/maine-homeless-population-numbered-2-106-last-year-study-finds/article\\_8b65a052-5084-11eb-904c-53705764352f.html](https://www.thecentersquare.com/maine/maine-homeless-population-numbered-2-106-last-year-study-finds/article_8b65a052-5084-11eb-904c-53705764352f.html).